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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 1988, the Dallas (Texas) Independent School District mounted an initiative to locate, document, and possibly recover students who did not return to school following summer vacation as expected (no-shows). A scan of the district's student database yielded 7,105 secondary school no-shows and 7,880 elementary school no-shows. Rosters of no-shows were prepared, by school, and delivered to the offices of the assistant superintendents to be distributed to their respective schools. School personnel identified no-shows as not located, private school, alternative school, public school outside of Dallas, moved out, dropped out, pushout (suspended, expelled, incarcerated, or institutionalized student), health/death, district (student attended school elsewhere in the district, and other. Of the 7,105 secondary school no-shows, only 300 were returned without having been classified. Recovery efforts were undertaken and, by January 11, 1989, nearly 30% of no-shows were back in school. Of the 7,880 elementary school no-shows identified in September 1988, 5,096 were still outstanding in January 1989. Characteristics of no-shows and the disposition of no-shows at both the elementary and the secondary school levels were examined. The results question the very high estimates of dropout rates that are often cited; suggest that the recovery of no-shows is not affected by extraordinary effort; and raise questions concerning the utility of including summer no-shows in counts of dropouts. (NB)

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NO-SHOWS AND DROPOUTS OVER SUMMER VACATION: A Report of the Dallas ISD's Efforts to Locate, Document, and Recover Students Who Drop Out of Schools Over Summer Vacation

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Office of Institutional Research

(Dallas Independent School District: Dallas, Texas)

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A few years ago, the Education Commission of the States (1985) noted that in the United States nearly one in every four students does not graduate from high school. Among the nations inner-city schools, this average was estimated at nearly one in two. These estimates are consistent with those given in many other studies (e.g., Orr, 1987a, 1987b; Stephenson, 1985; Tugend, 1985; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1985). On the other hand, other studies have produced more conservative estimates of dropout rates. For instance, Rumberger (1987), citing U.S. Census Bureau figures, estimates the dropout rate among persons 16 and 17 years old at 6.8 percent and for persons 18 and 19 years old at 15.2 percent.

In a paper describing various ways to compute dropout rates, Olson (1988a) showed how it is possible, using available data for a single year, in a single district, to obtain estimates of dropout rates ranging from 7 percent to 60 percent. The trick was in the particular way in which 'dropouts' were defined. Generally those definitions that call for computing dropout rates in terms of the numbers of students who drop out over the four years following their entry into grade nine yield much higher estimates than those definitions that count dropouts in a single year (the former is the type of definition that usually leads to the one-in-four to 50 percent estimate). Even within each "class" of definition there are variations that yield highly discrepant dropout rates.

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Yet the problems in computing accurate estimates of dropout rates is exacerbate by factors other than just those involving a lack of standardization in definition. LeCompte, and Goebel (1987) have documented many of these issues which they encountered in their attempts to estimate the extent of dropout in the Houston school district. They cite such problems as the failure of students to report their reasons for leaving school, school's inefficiency (even inability) in tracking students as they move from one school to another, the meaninglessness of categories to which school leavers might be assigned (e.g. "whereabouts unknown," "nonattendance," "dropped out of school"), and poor record-keeping in general as factors leading to inaccurate dropout statistics. Olson (undated) has cited these and other problems encountered in the Dallas ISD's efforts to produce dropout statistics in previous years.

The problem of not being able to classify school leavers accurately may be the most important factor in explaining the wide variation that exists in reported dropout rates among the nation's schools. In Texas, in

particular, legislation has stipulated that all school leavers whose current educational status cannot be determined are to be counted as dropouts.

The magnitude of the problem is evident in the most recent report on dropouts in the Dallas ISD (Olson, 1988b). Among the 13,107 students listed on the district's database as withdrawn for the 1987-88 school year, only a little over one-fifth (2,890 students) could, with fair reliability, be counted as bonafied dropouts. Over a third (4,729 students) had to be categorized as having left the district during the school year for "unknown" reasons. Even a higher proportion (5,270 or 40%) were listed as "No-Shows" (i.e., students who were expected to enroll following the 1987 summer vacation, but never did). The "No-Shows" and the "Withdrawn for Unknown Reasons" taken together accounted for over 76 percent of the 21.18 percent dropout rate reported for the district's secondary schools. Unless the district is able, somehow, to better account for its withdrawing students it faces little hope of ever attaining the state's goal of a dropout rate less than five percent. Little chance, that is, as long as the state persists in the rule that all unaccounted-for school leavers be counted as dropouts.

These concerns, in addition to the more important, genuine concern for the educational welfare of its student constituency, provided the motivation for the study reported in this paper. This past fall, the Dallas ISD mounted a considerable initiative to locate, document, and possibly recover, students who did not return to school following summer vacation as expected (the so called, "No-Shows"). This effort was inaugurated with a press conference, held on September 9, at which time the superintendent presented a general outline of the district's plans. This effort was expected to yield heretofore unavailable information regarding the district's population of student dropouts.

METHOD

Populations. In order to accommodate the logistical requirements of the various departmental staffs involved, elementary school and secondary school no-shows were identified on separate occasions. On the morning of September 12, 1988, 7,105 secondary school no-shows were identified by scanning the district's student database for secondary students who were listed as having not yet returned to school. An identical procedure was used one week later (September 19) to identify the population of 7,880 elementary school no-shows.

Instrumentation. Once identified, rosters of no-shows were prepared, by school, and delivered to the offices of the appropriate assistant superintendents to be distributed to their respective schools. These rosters, a sample of which is included as Exhibit 1, served as the primary data collection instrument for this study. The rosters provided a response protocol for data collectors on the search teams (see below) to record the current status of those students they were able to locate. Thus, for each student identified as a no-show, a data collector was to assign the student to one of following 10 categories:

Not Located (NotLoc): This category was to be used only when all attempts to locate the student were unsuccessful.

Private School (PrvSch): Students were assigned to this category when it was learned that they were currently attending a private school.

Alternative School (AltSch): Students assigned to this category were known to be attending some form of alternative educational program other than a recognized public or private school.

Public School (PubSch): This category was used for students currently known to be attending a public school outside the Dallas ISD.

Moved Out (MovOut): When it was learned that a student had moved out of the area served by the district, but it was not known whether the student was still attending school, the student was assigned to this category.

Dropped Out: (DrpOut): A student was assigned to this category when it was learned that he or she, voluntarily, was no longer attending school and had not graduated.

Pushout (PshOut): This category was assigned to students who were suspended, expelled, incarcerated, institutionalized or otherwise involuntarily forced out of the educational system.

Health/Death (HthDth): When it was learned that a student was no longer attending school due to illness, or because he or she had died, the student was assigned this category.

District (Dstrct): When students were found to be attending school elsewhere in the district they were assigned this category.

Other (Other): This final category was used as a catchall when none of the other categories applied.

The completed response sheets (rosters) were to be returned to school principals within two weeks. Principals, in turn, were to forward them to OIR.

Search Teams and Data Collection. Principals were asked to utilize their own staffs in making an initial attempt at classifying the students identified on their schools' no-show rosters. It was expected that the bulk of the work of accounting for the students would be accomplished at this level. Additionally, personnel from several central offices were made available for more extensive efforts at locating students not accounted for in this first attempt. Specifically, special education visiting teachers, personnel from the Youth Action Centers and the Department of Psychological Services, and parent ombudsmen were assigned temporarily to this task.

Preparation and Training. Two meetings were held, one with elementary school principals and one with secondary school principals, at which time the purpose of the data collection and recovery effort was explained and its importance stressed. Principals were shown examples of the data collection instrument (i.e., the no-show roster) and provided an explanation of the the categories. Also, principals were asked at that time to utilize their own staffs in attempting an initial determination of their no-shows' current disposition. Finally, principals were told that additional personnel (as described in the previous paragraph) would be contacting them to help in locating those no-shows that remained not located.

The meeting with secondary school principals was held on September 12, 1988 -- the same day the rosters of no-shows became available. Principals were given their schools' rosters during the meeting. The meeting with elementary school principals was held on September 15, 1988 in conjunction with a regularly-scheduled principals' meeting. Since their schools' rosters were not to be created until the following Monday the elementary school principals were told to expect the rosters early the following week.

An additional training meeting was held on September 13, 1988 for the extra-school personnel, recruited from various district-wide departments, including psychological services, special education, youth action centers, and parent ombudsmen, who were to assist local school personnel in the location and data collection effort. The purposes of this meeting included orientation, instruction on filling out the response instrument (roster), procedures to be followed when making house calls, and school assignment.

Database Searches. The district's student database was searched for no-shows twice following the initial searches on September 12 and 19. The second search for no-shows occurred on October 4 and 11 for secondary and elementary schools, respectively. A final search of the database was performed on January 11, 1989 for both secondary and elementary school no-shows. The results of these additional searches were used as benchmarks against which the effectiveness of the recovery effort could be gaged.

Treatment of Response Data. The follow-up database searches afforded the opportunity to correct some errors in coding that might otherwise have gone undetected. For instance, several of the no-shows, at both the elementary and secondary level, were not classified. However, on subsequent searches of the district's database they were found in attendance at another district school. On the basis of these searches we assigned these students to the 'Dstrct' category. In other instances, students assigned to one of the other no-show categories were later found to be in attendance at some district school. These students were similarly reclassified as belonging to the Dstrct category. Thus, wherever possible, the responses recorded by the data collectors were corrected on the basis of follow-up searches of the district's database.

TABLE 1

Numbers and Percentages of
Secondary School No-Shows

	District	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Enrollment on Oct. 4, 1988*	51506	10161	26030	14070	1245
No-Shows on Sept. 12, 1988					
Number	7105	1545	3603	1782	175
Percent	13.8	15.2	13.8	12.7	14.1
No-Shows on Oct. 4, 1988					
Number	5276	1393	2467	1264	152
Percent	10.2	13.7	9.5	9.0	12.2
No-Shows on Jan. 11, 1989					
Number	5002	1328	2339	1187	148
Percent	9.7	13.1	9.0	8.5	11.9
	One Year Earlier October 9, 1987				
Enrollment	52434	11020	27111	13071	1232
No-Shows					
Number	5715	1686	2467	1359	196
Percent	10.9	15.3	9.1	10.4	15.9

RESULTS

The effort to locate, document, and recover no-shows was mounted on a large scale. In addition to the numerous local school staffs that worked on the project, approximately 100 extra-school personnel were involved in collecting data out in the community. These additional personnel invested over 7000 man hours at an estimated cost of over $114,000 in salaries alone. This does not take into account the additional cost of mileage incurred in canvassing neighborhoods.

The efforts to locate no-shows proceeded more or less independently in the districts elementary and secondary schools. For this reason the results of the two efforts are presented separately.

Secondary Schools

Data Collection. All phases of the data collection effort flowed smoothly among the district's secondary schools. The rosters of no-shows were delivered promptly, the procedures used in locating or otherwise accounting for students on the rosters appeared well-organized, and the individuals charged with classifying students seemed to be well instructed in the procedures for filling in the response protocols. By October 20, all of the district's secondary schools had returned their no-show rosters to OIR.

Of the 7,105 no-shows included on the original rosters, only 300, or 4.2 percent, were returned without having been classified. On the other hand, 1,481, or 20.8 percent of the categories assigned by the data collectors were later reassigned on the basis of the follow-up database searches. Most of these reassignments (89.1%), however, were for students originally assigned to the categories NotLoc, MovOut, and Other. Thus the follow-up searches were effective in locating a large number of students whose whereabouts had gone undetermined by the search teams.

Recovery Effort. The results of the no-show recovery effort for secondary schools is summarized in Table 1. On October 4, 1989[1] the district's secondary school enrollment, including the no-shows, was 51,506 students (grade levels seven through twelve). Of these 7,105, or 13.8 percent had been listed as no-shows (expected, but not enrolled) when the rosters were created on September 12. By October 4, five weeks following their initial identification, the number of no-shows, district wide, had declined to 5,276 students, or 10.2 percent of the expected enrollment. Twelve weeks later the number of secondary school no-shows remaining on the district's database was 5,002, or 9.7 percent of the referenced enrollment. Thus, by October 4, 25.7 percent of the no-shows had been recovered

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[1]The district's enrollment on the morning of October 4, 1988 is used as a baseline reference point. This enrollment figure, which includes all students expected to be enrolled at the beginning of the fall semester (i.e., it includes the no-shows) as well as any students new to the district following the beginning of the school year, is used as a reference baseline.

TABLE 2

Characteristics of Secondary School No-Shows

	Total	Percentages			
		OvrAge	<40%R	<40%M	GPA<70
All Races/Ethnicities					
District, June, 1988	48417	23	53	45	20
No-Shows, Sept. 12, 1988	7105	66	65	54	51
Recovered, Oct. 4, 1988	1829	70	73	61	47
White					
District, June, 1988	9941	15	27	24	11
No-Shows, Sept. 12, 1988	1545	55	38	30	34
Recovered, Oct. 4, 1988	152	61	33	33	34
Black					
District, June, 1988	25323	22	55	54	22
No-Shows, Sept. 12, 1988	3603	66	73	62	58
Recovered, Oct. 4, 1988	1136	67	76	65	49
Hispanic					
District, June, 1988	11971	33	57	45	22
No-Shows, Sept. 12, 1988	1782	75	70	55	53
Recovered, Oct. 4, 1988	518	78	75	56	45
Other					
District, June, 1988	1182	32	37	8	11
No-Shows, Sept. 12, 1988	175	62	50	24	29
Recovered, Oct. 4, 1988	23	87	57	36	38

(see Table 2). By January 11, nearly 30 percent of them were back in school. It would appear, then, that the effort expended to locate and recover no-shows was at least moderately successful. However, consider the last row in Table 1. There, the no-show rates for October 9, 1987, one year earlier, are given. When these are compared to the rates for this year (October 4, 1988) it is clear that the effort resulted in very little recovery over what normally occurs anyway. By October 4 of this school year only one-half of one percent more no-shows were identified as having returned to school as compared to the percentage of no-shows that had returned by the same time the previous year.

Characteristics of No-Shows. Table 2 provides a brief look at a limited set of characteristics of no-shows. In comparison with the total district enrollment, a large proportion of the no-shows were overage for their grade level (66 percent of the no-shows vs. 23 percent of all secondary school students). Additionally, no-shows had poorer results on achievement tests: 65 percent and 54 percent of the no-shows scored below the 40th percentile in reading and mathematics, respectively, the last time they took a standardized achievement tests (ITBS or TAP). In contrast, according to the latest district-wide test results (1987) 53 percent and 45 percent of secondary school students scored below the 40th percentile in reading and mathematics, respectively. Furthermore, about half the no-shows (51%) had a failing grade-point-average at the end of last year whereas only one-fifth (20%) of the secondary enrollment had a failing average.

Among the no-shows that had returned to school by the first week in October, a greater percentage (70%) were overaged. Moreover, higher percentages of those returning were poorer students than those who left (73 percent had reading scores below the 40th percentile, 61 percent had mathematics scores below the 40th percentile, and 47 percent had failing grade point averages at the end of the 1987-88 school year).

Disposition of No-Shows. While the district's initiative could not be said to have had a substantial impact on the recovery of no-shows, it did provide valuable information concerning the disposition of no-shows. Ignoring for the moment the fact that roughly one-third of the no-shows remained not located, the first (left-hand) section of Table 3 shows that 32 percent of the no-shows were classified as either attending a private school (4%), another public school outside the district (15%), or had otherwise moved out of the area served by the Dallas ISD (13%). Using a few reasonable, simplifying assumptions, it is possible to improve upon these estimates.

First, we can assume that we have an accurate count of the number of original no-shows now in attendance at another district school (Dstrct). Second, it may be reasonable to assume that if we had been able to locate those cases finally classified as not located (NotLoc) they would actually have been distributed among all the remaining no-show categories, except Dstrct, in roughly the same proportions as the cases that were classified. Thus, if we allocate the students who remained not located proportionately across the other categories and recompute the percentages accordingly (as has been done in the center section of the table), then over half (55%) the no-shows are estimated either to be attending school elsewhere or to have moved out of the district (and possibly attending school

elsewhere).

Only six percent of the no-shows could be categorically classified as dropouts (the left-hand section of Table 3). Again, however, after taking a proportional number of the not-located no-shows, as was just done, an adjusted estimate of the true percentage of dropouts among the no-shows is given as ten percent (center section). This should be considered a conservative estimate, however, since we do not know how many of the students that moved out of the area or were classified as no-shows for "other" reasons actually dropped out of school. A more liberal estimate of the percentage of dropouts among the no-shows can be computed by collapsing the categories NotLoc, MovOut, and Other into a single group and then distributing this group proportionately across the remaining categories excluding Dstrct. This has been done in the right-hand section of Table 3, where an estimated dropout rate of 16 percent of the original no-shows is given.

There are some interesting patterns in Table 3 that may be worth pointing out. In particular, considering any of the three sections, the percentage of white students estimated to be attending public school outside the district is considerably higher than that estimated for either blacks or Hispanics. On the other hand, the estimated percentages of black and Hispanic students attending other schools within the district is nearly three times as great as that estimated for whites. Yet, when these two components are added, within race/ethnicity, the percentages of students attending a school other than the one in which they were expected to be found are roughly equal (using the left hand section of Table 3: white, 42%; black 43%; Hispanic, 38%). The implications here have more to do with mobility than dropping out of school. Apparently many of the students, of all races, that do not show up in the schools where they are expected are indeed still attending school somewhere. White students, more often then not, will have moved to schools outside the district. On the other hand, blacks and Hispanics, while just as mobile will have moved within the district.

Differential rates of dropping out of school were found among races/ethnicities, however. If we are justified in assuming similar distributions in disposition of students who could not be located (NotLoc and, perhaps MovOut and Other) then the dropout rate among black and Hispanic no-shows is roughly two to three times the rate among white students.

Summer Dropout Rates for Secondary Schools. Knowing what percentage of the expected, fall 1988 enrollment was composed of no-shows, we can use our estimates of the dropout rate among no-shows to compute an estimate of the dropout rate over the summer vacation. Just as we had three estimates of the dropout rates among no-shows, we now have three estimates of the actual dropout rate expressed as percentages of the expected fall enrollment. The estimates are given in Table 4. The most noticeable aspect of the dropout rates given in Table 4 is the fact that they are so low. Under the most liberal estimate -- Adjustment 2 -- the overall dropout rate (over summer vacation) is estimated to be 2.2 percent of the expected fall enrollment. This figure seems at odds with the 30 to 50 percent, and more, figures often quoted as the district's dropout rate. We will have more to say about this finding in the discussion at the end of this report. For now it is sufficient to point out that these findings are de-

TABLE 3

Empirical and Estimated Dispositions of
Secondary School No-Shows

	PERCENTAGES														
	No Adjustment					Adjustment 1[a]					Adjustment 2[b]				
	TOT	WHT	BLK	HSP	OTH	TOT	WHT	BLK	HSP	OTH	TOT	WHT	BLK	HSP	OTH
NotLoc	30	21	34	29	27	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
PrvSch	4	9	1	3	4	7	12	2	5	6	11	16	3	9	10
AltSch	2	2	1	2	2	3	3	2	3	3	5	4	3	6	5
PubSch	15	32	11	9	27	25	42	22	15	39	40	59	36	46	65
MovOut	13	17	10	15	19	23	22	20	25	28	--	--	--	--	--
DrpOut	6	5	6	8	3	10	6	12	14	4	16	9	19	25	4
PshOut	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	2	0	1	3	2	3	0	2
HthDth	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	2	2	0	3	2	3	3	0
Dstrct	26	10	32	29	13	26	10	32	29	13	26	10	32	29	13
Other	3	3	3	4	5	5	1	6	7	19	--	--	--	--	--

Note: NotLoc: Not Located; PrvSch: Private School; AltSch: Alternative School; PubSch: Public School; MovOut: Moved Out of Area; PshOut: Forced Out of School; HthDth: Health/Death; Dstrct: Other DISD School; Other: Other Reason.

[a]The estimates given under Adjustment 1 were computed by first distributing the no-shows in the NotLoc category proportionately across all the other categories except Dstrct, which was considered fixed.

[b]To compute the estimates given under Adjustment 2, the categories, NotLoc, MovOut, and Other were combined as a group and the members of this group distributed proportionately across six of the remaining seven categories. The category, Dstrct, was held constant.

TABLE 4

Estimates of the Dallas ISD's
Secondary School Summer Dropout Rates

	TOT	WHT	BLK	HSP	OTH
No Adjustment	.8	.8	.8	1.0	.4
Adjustment 1	1.4	.9	1.6	1.8	.6
Adjustment 2	2.2	1.4	2.5	3.2	.6

rived from the best data of this type ever collected in the district.

Elementary Schools

Data Collection. The collection of data did not flow as smoothly in elementary schools as it did in the district's secondary schools. The effort encountered problems right from the start. As mentioned earlier, the no-show rosters for elementary schools were delivered to the the office of the Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Operations on September 19. However, due to a mix-up they were not distributed to the individual schools (on that date, as expected) until a week later, all the time during which elementary school principals were being told that they should already have received their rosters.

The parent ombudsmen, who were assigned to aid the elementary schools, reported to their assigned schools on September 19 and, of course, were told that the no-show rosters were not yet available. However, the arrival of the ombudsmen with their expectations of being given follow-up assignments only added to the confusion. The staffs of many schools, believing that they had either misunderstood their instructions or that their school's roster had somehow gotten lost, began photocopying the blank, sample roster distributed at the principals' meeting on September 15, and filling in names from another source. Later, when parent ombudsmen were given these "makeshift" rosters, they realized immediately the rosters were not the correct forms and began to protest.

Eventually, on September 23, the mix-up was discovered and arrangements made to disseminate the correct no-show rosters the following week. The effort to locate no-shows began in earnest, in the elementary schools, on September 28.

The procedures to be followed called for school staffs to make the initial attempt at determining their no-shows' current status. The parent ombudsmen were to assist schools by going out into the community in an attempt to locate those students who could not be located in the first attempt by the school's staff. Completed rosters were to be turned in to the school principal who, in turn, was to forward them to the appropriate executive director. The executive directors were to send all data to OIR. While most schools followed the procedures as best as could be expected given the earlier state of confusion, many turned their roster over to the parent ombudsmen with no apparent attempt at first having tried to locate any of the students.

The parent ombudsmen reported having returned all rosters to the schools by October 7. By October 20, however, only 53 percent of the elementary schools' rosters had been received by OIR. Moreover, as of the date this report is being written (January 13, 1989), the data from sixteen of the elementary schools have yet to be received. This, in part, accounts for the relatively large proportion (17.5%) of cases with missing data.

Of the original October 11 enrollment[2] of 7,880 elementary school no-shows only a modest 14 percent were reassigned to the Dstrct category on the basis of the follow-up databases searches. Moreover, of these nearly all (95%) either had no categorization data or had been assigned to the NotLoc, MovOut or Other category. Thus, while there may have been a larger than desired proportion of missing data, that data that was collected appeared quite reliable.

Recovery Effort. Statistics summarizing the effect of the tremendous effort in locating and recovering elementary students who failed to return to district schools following summer vacation are given in Table 5. The table also contains comparative data from the previous school year. On September 19, 1988, 7,880 elementary school no-shows were identified. This group constituted 10.4 percent of the base, elementary school enrollment of 75,969 students. By October 11, there were 5,909 no-shows outstanding, or a no-show rate of 7.8 percent of the base enrollment. This rate can be compared to the 7.7 percent obtained a year earlier when no special effort was made to recover no-shows. On January 11, 1989 the no-show rate had declined slightly to 6.7 percent of the base enrollment. It can be concluded that the recovery effort had no effect.

Characteristics of No-Shows. Summary data on a very limited set of characteristics is given in Table 6. Overall, 28 percent of the no-shows were overage (one year or more) for their grade level assignment. This can be compared to the ten percent of the overall elementary enrollment that was overaged. Achievement results were lover for no-shovs: 54 percent scored below the 40th percentile in reading, and 36 percent below the 40th percentile in mathematics, the last time they took the ITBS. According to the most recent district-wide results (1987), 46 percent and 32 percent of the elementary students scored below the 40th percentile in reading and mathematics respectively.

The elementary no-shows who returned to the district by the second week in October were overage in greater proportion (33%) than were the original pool of no-shows (28%). Also, as was true for secondary school no-shovs, those who returned to the district were poorer students: 65 percent were below the 40th percentile in reading and 45 percent were below in mathematics.

Disposition of No-Shovs. The response data collected via the no-show rosters are summarized in Table 7. Even after correcting these data on the basis of follow-up database searches 34 percent of the no-show group remained unlocated (NotLoc). On the other hand, 40 percent of them were reported either to be attending a private school (PrvSch, 4%), another public school outside the Dallas ISD (PubSch, 19%), or to have moved out of the area served by the district (MovOut, 17%). An additional 25 per-

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[2]The enrollment on the morning of October 11, 1988 was used as the reference baseline enrollment for elementary schools. As with the secondary schools, this included all students expected at the beginning of the year as well as all new students to this date.

TABLE 5

Numbers and Percentages of
Elementary School No-Shows

	District	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Enrollment on Oct. 4, 1988*	75969	14438	34752	25203	1576
No-Shows on Sept. 19, 1988					
Number	7880	1978	3592	2100	210
Percent	10.4	13.7	10.3	8.3	13.9
No-Shows on Oct. 11, 1988					
Number	5909	1774x	2505	1442	188
Percent	7.8	12.3	7.2	5.7	11.9
No-Shows on Jan. 11, 1989					
Number	5096	1676x	2066	1179	175
Percent	6.7	11.6	5.9	4.7	11.1
	One Year Earlier October 9, 1987				
Enrollment	75489	14748	35214	23887	1640
No-Shows					
Number	6817	2035	2607	1938	237
Percent	7.7	13.8	7.4	8.1	14.4

TABLE 6

Selected Characteristics of
Elementary School No-Shows

	Percentages			
	Total	OvrAge	<40%R	<40%M
All Races/Ethnicities				
District, June, 1988	75420	10	46	32
No-Shows, Sept. 19, 1988	7880	28	54	36
Recovered, Oct. 11, 1988	1971	33	65	45
White				
District, June, 198	14292	8	29	21
No-Shows, Sept. 19, 1988	1978	24	36	21
Recovered, Oct. 11, 1988	204	2	50	29
Black				
District, June, 1988	35317	9	52	38
No-Shows, Sept. 19, 1988	3592	27	59	40
Recovered, Oct. 11, 1988	1087	28	64	46
Hispanic				
District, June, 1988	24180	14	50	32
No-Shows, Sept. 19, 1988	2100	35	63	42
Recovered, Oct. 11, 1988	658	40	72	48
Other				
District, June, 1988	1631	13	37	14
No-Shows, Sept. 19, 1988	210	29	50	23
Recovered, Oct. 11, 1988	22	36	65	23

Note: OvrAge: One or more years older than peers for a given grade level classification; <40%R: Less than the 40th percentile on the ITBS nationally, norm-referenced reading subtest; <40%M: Less than the 40th percentile on the ITBS mathematics subtest.

cent were located in other district schools.

When the unlocated no-shows were allocated among the other categories on the basis of the reasonable assumption that, as a group, they were distributed in a fashion similar to that of the other no-shows, only five percent of them were left unaccounted for. When the additional assumption that students reported as having moved out of the district's service area also were distributed as those remaining, all elementary school no-shows could be accounted for. In fact, our best estimate was that they are all attending school somewhere. No dropouts were reported among the elementary no-shows. This finding was not unexpected since according to state law students in the elementary school age bracket cannot dropout of school.

As was found for secondary schools, a much higher percentage of white students were reported as having moved to private schools or other public schools outside the district. Conversely, considerably higher percentages of black and Hispanic students had migrated to other schools within the district or had returned to their home schools. While the data support high rates of mobility among all groups of no-shows, it is obvious that whites had a much higher rate of extra-district mobility.

DISCUSSION

The results presented above need to be considered from several perspectives. On the one hand, they are in apparent contradiction with the results of many other studies that have appeared over the last several years. At a minimum the results call into questions the very high estimates of dropout rates that are often cited. The results suggest, also, that the recovery of no-shows is not affected by extraordinary effort. Finally, the results raise questions concerning the utility of including summer no-shows in counts of dropouts. These and other important points are addressed in the paragraphs that follow.

Should No-Shows be Counted as Dropouts? In their guidelines for reporting dropout statistics, the Texas Education Agency has stipulated that no-shows, i.e., students who fail to enroll during the fall semester as expected, and whose whereabouts cannot otherwise be determined, are to be counted as dropouts. For large school districts with large numbers of no-shows, high rates of student mobility, and complicated procedures for tracking students, this stipulation is patently unfair. As the study reported here has clearly shown, many if not most students listed as no-shows can reasonably be assumed to be attending school elsewhere. Additional, another large percentage of those students listed as no-shows during the first few weeks of school eventually are found to be in attendance. The sheer numbers of no-shows at the start of an academic year places a considerable burden on record-keeping mechanisms. It may be impossible for large school districts, without adopting the extraordinary effort expended here, to adequately account for all its no-shows. The penalty is a spuriously high dropout rate.

Beyond the problem of counting matriculating students as dropouts is the problem of jurisdiction. Should districts be held accountable for students who move out of their service areas? Apparently under state

TABLE 7

Empirical and Estimated Dispositions of
Elementary School No-Shows

	PERCENTAGES														
	No Adjustment					Adjustment 1[a]					Adjustment 2[b]				
	TOT	WHT	BLK	HSP	OTH	TOT	WHT	BLK	HSP	OTH	TOT	WHT	BLK	HSP	OTH
NotLoc	34	32	35	34	28	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
PrvSch	4	8	2	3	3	7	12	4	6	4	13	19	4	13	9
AltSch	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
PubSch	19	29	17	12	27	35	45	34	24	39	62	70	38	52	80
MovOut	17	21	14	16	30	31	33	28	32	44	--	--	--	--	--
DrpOut	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PshOut	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HthDth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dstrct	25	10	30	31	11	25	10	30	31	11	25	10	30	31	11
Other	1	0	1	3	1	5	1	6	7	19	--	--	--	--	--

Note: NotLoc: Not Located; PrvSch: Private School; AltSch: Alternative School; PubSch: Public School; MovOut: Moved Out of Area; PshOut: Forced Out of School; HthDth: Health/Death; Dstrct: Other DISD School; Other: Other Reason.

[a]The estimates given under Adjustment 1 were computed by first distributing the no-shows in the NotLoc category proportionately across all the other categories except Dstrct, which was considered fixed.

[b]To compute the estimates given under Adjustment 2, the categories, NotLoc, MovOut, and Other were combined as a group and the members of this group distributed proportionately across six of the remaining seven categories. The category, Dstrct, was held constant.

regulations they are. Thus, in Dallas, under a conservative estimate, 13 to 17 percent of the no-shows are to be counted as dropouts simply because their families choose to move away from the district's jurisdiction.

In a district report published this past year, Olson (1988b) reported several statistics all of which were components of the secondary school dropout rate required in state reporting guidelines. The overall dropout rate given there was 21.2 percent of which no-shows accounted for a little less than half (40.1%). If the liberal estimate for the true dropout rate among no-shows, given in the right-hand section of Table 3, were applied to the figures in the earlier report, the dropout rate reported there would have been attenuated to 13.2 percent.

Recovery of No-Shows. Something must be said regarding the district's success, or rather lack of success, in recovering no-shows. In spite of the effort, the rate of return to the district was no greater this year than it was the previous year when no special effort was made. By early October the percentages of the district's expected enrollment remaining classified as no-shows were approximately equivalent both years. But should we have expected higher rates of recovery? In hindsight the data suggest that this may have been too optimistic a goal. Certainly, the only no-shows we had any real hope of recovering were those students who would have to be classified as bonafied dropouts. But, as we have seen, dropouts must be regarded as constituting a relatively small percentage of the originally identified no-shows. There just were not that many kids to recover in the first place! The data suggest further that those students who can eventually be classified as bonafied dropouts are far more difficult to recover than was expected.

What Is the District's Summer Dropout Rate? Readers familiar with the high dropout rates reported elsewhere, or otherwise used to hearing about high dropout rates from other sources, may be troubled by the relatively low estimates we obtained of the district's (secondary school) summer dropout rate. Those readers may question our assumptions in allocating only a proportional share of those no-shows originally classified as NotLoc, MovOut, or Other to the DrpOut category. They may feel that we should have allocated more students to the dropout category. While it may be reasonable to argue, for instance, that many of the students in these three categories are there principally because they fit the typical dropout profile,(which included a high rate of mobility. However, we had additional data that tended to support, or at least not refute, our assumptions.

The data-collection instrument (i.e., the no-show rosters) contained a space for the data collectors to record comments and observations. In their training meeting, the data collectors were encouraged to make generous use of this area. Accordingly, most of the responses were accompanied by comments. A perusal of the comments recorded for those no-shows classified as NotLoc revealed that in the two-thirds of the cases where comments were made, the most frequent comment was "moved." Less frequent, but still common, were the comments, "vacant house" and "no answer". Among the variety of other comments few were given that would imply, directly, that the student had dropped out of school. Indeed, the overall impression we obtained from the comments accompanying students classified as NotLoc was that most of these students, along with their families, had

moved, leaving no readily available forwarding address.

In contrast, nearly all the responses for no-shows classified as MovOut were accompanied by comments indicating that these students, again along with their families, had moved out of the district's attendance area. In no case did the comments suggest that a student had dropped out of school. On the other hand, nearly all those assigned to the Other category had comments that erroneously placed them in other district schools (our follow-up database searches established that they were <u>not</u> attending district schools).

It must noted that assignment to these categories was based upon whatever information, direct or indirect, could be gleaned from a variety of sources including fieldwork in the community. In most cases it appeared that the only thing that made a difference as to whether a no-show was assigned to NotLoc or to MovOut was that in the latter case the data collector was told, or otherwise was able to determine, that the student's family had moved to another city. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that the no-shows assigned to these two categories, NotLoc and MovOut, were similar. They were students who had moved away and were probably attending schools (or not attending any school) in proportions equivalent to those whose residence remained within the district's boundaries.

We may be on less solid ground in treating as similar those no-shows assigned to the Other category. As was mentioned above, the majority of these students were (erroneously) placed in other district schools by the data collectors. Yet they were not found in subsequent database searches. Thus, in effect, they remained no-shows who could not be located. We included these students in the pool that was redistributed because: one, we could not verify that they belonged in any other category, and two, we thought that they would be distributed, at least approximately, like those in the NotLoc and MovOut categories.

<u>Yearly Dropout Rates vs. Longitudinal Dropout Rates.</u> Earlier, in the introductory paragraphs of this report, we pointed out that high estimates of dropout rates are usually derived from longitudinal procedures; i.e., procedures which count dropouts over several years of schooling, usually from the time of entry into the ninth grade, but sometimes from the time of entry into the seventh grade. This study, since it is a one-shot effort, does not permit direct computations of longitudinal dropout rates. However, again using some reasonable assumptions, we are able to arrive at plausible estimates. We computed dropout rates among no-shows within grade levels seven through twelve. These are given in the upper portion of Table 8. Two estimates are given: one based upon the unadjusted distribution of no-shows to categories, and a second based upon a redistribution of no-show from the categories NotLoc, MovOut, and Other, as was done previously.

If we assume that the proportion of dropouts at any given grade level remains fairly stable over several years (our only assumption, here) then an estimate of the dropout rate (during summer vacation) over six years, from the time students were expected enter grade seven, is computed by summing the rates over the six grade levels. The unadjusted and adjusted, grade by grade, dropout rates yield two estimates of longitudinal dropout rates. Using only those students originally classified as dropouts, our

TABLE 8

Secondary School Dropout Rates by Grade Level
and Longitudinal Estimates of Dropout

	Grd 7	Grd 8	Grd 9	Grd 10	Grd 11	Grd 12
Baseline Enrollment	10032	8934	12935	7933	6660	5912
Number	1434	946	2315	1028	767	611
Percent	12.3	10.6	19.3	12.9	11.5	10.3
Classified DrpOut (%)						
No Adjustment	1	2	7	9	9	15
Adjustment 2[a]	3	5	20	15	23	38
Dropout Rate (%)						
No Adjustment	0.1	0.2	1.4	1.2	1.0	1.5
Adjustment 2[b]	0.4	0.5	3.9	1.9	2.6	3.9

Estimates of Longitudinal
Dropout Rates

Conservative 5.0%
Liberal 13.2%

[a]The adjustment here is the same as that made for Adjustment 2 in Table 3. Thuse, the no-shows originally assigned to NotLoc, MovOut, and Other were redistributed proportionately across the remaining categories save Dstrct, which was held fixec.

[b]This adjusted dropout rate corresponds to Adjustment 2 rate given in Table 3 for all secondary schools.

conservative estimate is five percent. On the other hand, when we allocate a proportionate share of the NotLocs, MovOuts, and Others we obtain a more liberal longitudinal dropout estimate of 13.2 percent.

Finally, we need to stress the point that, with respect to dropout rates, this study looked only at dropouts over summer vacation. Certainly additional students drop out of school during the course of the year. However, as is clear in the district's dropout indices report of last year (Olson, 1988b), only a little over four-and-a-half percent of the secondary school enrollment typically can be identified as bonafied dropouts. Another seven-and-a-half percent of the enrollment leaves the district for reasons that cannot be determined through usual means. Adding these percentages to our estimated, secondary school, summer dropout rates (Table 4) yields a yearlong dropout estimate between six percent (conservative) and fourteen percent (liberal). The need for an additional study to locate and document dropouts during the academic year is obvious.

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EXHIBIT 1

Dropout/At-Risk Data Collection Form

(See instructions contained on a separate sheet)

YOUR NAME : SCHOOL : DATE : PAGE :

PRIOR TO INQUIRY

NoSho No Show
DrpOt Dropout
UnKwn Unknown

FOLLOWING INQUIRY

NotLoc Unable to locate
PrvSch Private school
AltSch Alternative school
PubSch Public school
MovOut Moved out of area
DrpOut Voluntary dropout
PshOut Suspension expulsion
HthDth Health death
Dstrct Other DISD school

ID (1) NoSho (2) DrpOt (3) UnKwn (01) NotLoc (02) PrvSch (03) AltSch (04) PubSch (05) MovOut (06) DrpOut (07) PshOut (08) HthDth (09) Dstrct (10) Other

NAME :
P/G NAME :
ADDRESS :
CITY/ZIP : GRD :
PHONE : DOB :
COMMENT :

ID (1) NoSho (2) DrpOt (3) UnKwn (01) NotLoc (02) PrvSch (03) AltSch (04) PubSch (05) MovOut (06) DrpOut (07) PshOut (08) HthDth (09) Dstrct (10) Other

NAME :
P/G NAME :
ADDRESS :
CITY/ZIP : GRD :
PHONE : DOB :
COMMENT :

ID (1) NoSho (2) DrpOt (3) UnKwn (01) NotLoc (02) PrvSch (03) AltSch (04) PubSch (05) MovOut (06) DrpOut (07) PshOut (08) HthDth (09) Dstrct (10) Other

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PHONE : DOB :
COMMENT :

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NAME :
P/G NAME :
ADDRESS :
CITY/ZIP : GRD :
PHONE : DOB :
COMMENT :

Return form to: Office of Institutional Research, Box 55, Administration Building